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Book review: failure of charisma: the cultural revolution in Wuhan. by Wang Shaoguang

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Failure of Charisma: The Cultural Revolution in Wuhan. by Wang Shaoguang
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rect in asserting that this may be a more subversive tack since it relegates ethnicity to something less than a primordial component of identity. Perhaps more analysis of the conditions that produce this result might have been in order here.

Finally in a postscript, the author considers the effects of events after 1987 on the lives of the refugees. In their letters, signs of hope emerged that a Burundian policy of national reconciliation and refugee repatriation was beginning to bear fruit. Unfortunately these hopes were dashed in October 1993 when the first democratically elected president, a Hutu, Melchior Ndadaye, was captured and later killed by a group of Tutsi army officers in a coup attempt. Despite the fact that the coup was unsuccessful, it abetted the destablization process that was underway in both Burundi and Rwanda. Subsequent events in both countries have once again demonstrated the tragedy of ethnic essentialization.

Purity and Exile provides welcome insight into these tragic and repetitive processes and a needed anthropological perspective. At times the analysis does not go far enough, but this may be a fault of the discipline in general. What do we do as anthropologists when the mythicohistories of our interlocutors serve to perpetuate the human tragedies to which they continue to fall victim?

Failure of Charisma: The Cultural Revolution in Wuhan. By Wang Shaoguang. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. Pp. xi+345. $75.00.

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The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was one of the major upheavals of the modern era. It brought death, injury, or displacement to millions and both a vision of radical democracy and an experience of radical disappointment to at least as many. The literature documenting the decade of turmoil is vast, augmented in recent years by a huge and poignant (though not quite politically innocent) "literature of the wounded."

To the part of this literature that suggests participants in the Cultural Revolution must have been "crazy," or at least irrational in their blind obedience to Mao, Wang Shaoguang offers a corrective. Much of his argument will be familiar to sociologists as an echo of demonstrations of the rationality of rioters and protesters brought forward in challenges to collective behavior theory in the 1960s and 1970s. Wang demonstrates that movement participants acted largely on the basis of at least subconscious calculations of risks and rewards. That they were "true believers" in Mao's charismatic authority did not stop them from being rational actors. It was precisely in their pursuit of locally rational objectives, moreover, that millions of Chinese who believed themselves to be Mao's followers pushed and pulled the Cultural Revolution in directions Mao did not intend.

Wang focuses almost entirely on factional struggles in Wuhan, where he was a Red Guard and later a school teacher. His account is informed by a diary he kept in the early 1970s. It may also be informed by his own experiences as a movement participant, but he is not explicit about this and never reveals where he stood in relation to the events he describes (though he occasionally offers opinions on what he thinks were participants "real motives"). Wang makes good use of documentary sources, some only recently available to researchers, and of interviews with a range of citizens that he conducted in 1986. His reading of secondary, theoretical, and comparative literature is thin, however, and occasionally problematic. He argues, for example, that economic motives could not have been central to the struggles because the distribution of economic goods in Wuhan was radically egalitarian before the Cultural Revolution. But he reveals a 17.5 to 1 ratio between the earnings of the highest and lowest levels of administrative cadres—which is quite steep by comparison to, say, Scandinavia. (His own comparison to the United States is wildly off base; he claims [pp. 38, 294] a ratio of 7,000 to 1 to be the comparable figure!)

Wang's narrative is local, not national. He makes reference to events at the country's center only when directly relevant to his account of events in Wuhan. This fits with his point that local activists pursued interests rooted in their immediate situations, rather than in the ideological campaigns of Mao, the Gang of Four, or others. But it leaves the impact of the Cultural Revolution as a whole on the events in Wuhan as an unexplained set of exogenous factors. This may confuse those unfamiliar with some of those national-level events—say, those who are not sure what was at stake in struggling against Lin Biao and Confucius in 1974. It also means that Wang's story never addresses the initial movement, only concurring responses and countermoves. Indeed, the seeming arbitrariness of Beijing's messages was a problem for local-level rational actors whose environments it made unpredictable.

Wang contends that it did not much matter in Wuhan what those in Beijing *meant* to achieve by their various campaigns. Rather, locals fought battles over the distribution of power in which the sides were defined largely by who was on top in the initial Communist system of classification by class background and prior activism. The radicals of the Cultural Revolution were those who were disadvantaged by the old system; the conservatives were its beneficiaries. Beijing's various changes of course created (or removed) opportunities for each side to seize the initiative.

Wang shows the importance of rational, largely self-interested action in the micropolitics of Wuhan factionalism. But his repeated assertion of the "failure of charisma" is a bit strong. Clearly Mao's charisma does not explain all that went on, and clearly various people used Mao's rhetoric to their own ends. But charisma (which, after all, was not just an attribute of Mao, but of a social structure with Mao at its apex) was a potent force in generating action, even if Mao could not control it. And

rhetoric and ideology—revolutionary model operas, barefoot doctors, Mao Zedong Thought—did matter, even if they were not determinant.

Demonstrating that actors were in some respects rational does not amount to a rational choice explanation of the movement itself. Wang does not tell us much about the dynamics of recruitment, mobilization, leadership, organization, or communication; his account would be enhanced by more attention to the variables emphasized in political process and resource mobilization approaches. Though Wang relies occasionally on ad hoc references to "pent-up feelings" and "volcanic fury" (p. 265), he would benefit from more systematic attention to the emotion generated in the Cultural Revolution. Wang's argument is limited but nonetheless useful, especially for explaining patterns of participation and withdrawal in the later stages of the Cultural Revolution.

The Conscription Society: Administered Mass Organizations. By Gregory J. Kasza. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995. Pp. xii+217. $27.50.

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Kasza's book examines a unique organizational phenomenon—the administered mass organizations (AMOs)—in authoritarian societies. Studies of authoritarian (single-party, military) regimes primarily emphasize the role of the state and its party apparatus, whereas studies of liberal democracies typically focus on interest group politics. This book fills a conceptual gap in the state-society relationship in authoritarian societies: it examines the AMOs as a critical organizational link between the state and society and the institutional basis of the authoritarian states. Kasza's book provides an important angle to explain the rise and the persistence of authoritarian regimes in the 20th century.

The main contribution of this book is the development of a conceptual construct of the AMO as an identifiable and particular organizational form in political analysis. Kasza begins his study with an examination of their place in the political regimes (chap. 1). He makes a conceptual distinction between political parties, interest groups, and the AMOs. According to Kasza, AMOs are mass organizations that are subordinate to but not part of the ruling political party and the state; in contrast to interest groups, they are neither autonomous nor in a position to pursue their members' self-interests. In essence, AMOs are the "organizational weapons" of the authoritarian state to control its citizens on the one hand and to mobilize resources for the pursuit of the state's goal on the other. Kasza traced these features to the historical origin of AMOs—they were initiated in response to mobilization for wars, and their lineage ties across national boundaries.

The unique position of AMOs in the political regime is further established by a careful examination of their organizational structure (chap.